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Shorty

A 2-Minute Story
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MEETING AT THE BRIDGE

By Steve Harbor

I tested the shop doors along my beat. It was quiet in the early morning hours and still dark.

When I came to the river I saw him in the middle of the bridge.

He knew I was coming and he waited for me.

"Are things that bad?" I asked.

He looked at me for a moment and then turned his head back to the river. "My old man always expected too much of me," he said. "Right from the beginning."

"Maybe he just hoped for it. Because he wanted it for you."

"He was disappointed when I was in high school because I didn't make the football team," he began.

"That's no reason for feeling that he had it in for you," I told him.

"I got through high school," he continued, "and I even went to college. I washed out after one semester. But for one semester he was proud of me."

"That was natural."

He fingered the unlit cigarette. "And then came the army and Korea."

"Wasn't he proud of you, then?"

"At the beginning." He seemed to be smiling. "But, I went into the army a private, and I came out of the army a private. I did clerk's work at Division Headquarters. The only shots I heard were on the rifle range."

"Light the cigarette," I said.



"Are things that bad?" I asked.

He looked at it and his smile was thoughtful. "My old man smokes cigars. I can't. They're too strong for me."

"Is that important?"

"Everything is." He lit the cigarette. "And then he had something else in mind for me. He thought I ought to follow in his footsteps."

He flipped the cigarette into the river. "I didn't even get through training school."

I looked up to where the stars were. "Parents always expect too much of their children."

He smiled wryly. "Every child has the right to be a failure."

"Is your father a big success?" I asked.

He looked at me for a moment. "I guess so," he said. "He likes his job and is good at it."

"Just how good is he?" I asked. "Is he still at the same place he started 20 years ago, or has he become a big man? Maybe he thinks he's a failure, too."

A breeze ruffled his hair as we leaned on the rail, side by side.

"Were you really going to jump?" I asked.

"I don't know," he said. "Not here, though. I think I wanted to talk first."

"You should have done more

of that before this," I said. "You never did want to play football, or be a hero in Korea, or have the same kind of a job your old man has, did you?"

"No," he said.

"How was he to know that? Didn't you act as though you wanted these things, too?"

He looked at me. "A son wants to do the things that will make his father proud of him."

"A father is human. He makes mistakes," I said. "But deep inside, he wants you to do the things you really want to do."

He grinned suddenly, and put up the collar of his jacket.

* * *

"What are you going to do now?" I asked.

"Go home and get a few hours sleep," he said. "I won't be coming down to the river like this again, I promise."

He waved one hand and walked away.

I watched him go. He wasn't as tall as I am. But in a different way I thought he was much taller. I was proud of him.

I always had been.

My son turned the corner and disappeared.

I started walking my beat again.

(The End)